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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the effects of four forms of kinesic communication and three forms of verbal communication on leadership perception in a small group setting. Forty-eight college age discussants were observed in groups of four during twelve 30-minute sessions. Permitted only visual input, eleven previously trained observers recorded four areas of kinesic communication--dynamism, alertness, involvement, and participation. Simultaneously, with only auditory input, ten other trained observers rated the discussants on three verbal variables--group goal facilitation, individual prominence, and interpersonal relations. Finally, the discussants rated each other "on the amount of influence each had in the group." The experimenter presents three major conclusions: (1) of all the seven variables analyzed, participation, dynamism, and individual prominence (in that order) relate to leadership perception; (2) among the kinesic variables, participation and dynamism appear to influence leadership perception; and (3) among the verbal variables, individual prominence and group goal facilitation appear to influence leadership perception. (LG)

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KINESICS, COMMUNICATION AND GROUP INTERACTION

Paper presented at the convention of the
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by

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Kinesic Communication and Group Interaction: Let us Begin!

Research dealing with the behavior of people in groups has become increasingly prolific in the years since World War II. By 1953 Cartwright and Zander were able to synthesize the already voluminous literature in the first edition of their Group Dynamics. Fourteen years and two editions later, they reported:

> Many new problems have been investigated, new techniques of research have been invented, and new theoretical formulations have been produced. A deeper understanding of the central problems of group dynamics and a firmer empirical basis for conclusions have also been achieved.[1]

Studies dealing with leadership have been consistently in the forefront of this steady progress. The amount of literature dealing with this phenomenon has been so prodigious, and so widely disseminated over the social science fields that any attempt at synthesis should be regarded as either grandly heroic or idealistically foolhardy.

Such is not the case, however, with leadership studies of direct interest to the communications expert. With notable exceptions, such as the work of Bales,[2] Bormann in the Minnesota Studies,[3] and the recent study by Russell,[4] very little analysis has been made of communication patterns in groups as they relate to leadership. Probably the most neglected segment of leadership-communication has been that of kinesic, or body-motion communication. The science of kinesics, the study of

what is communicated by bodily movements, has been developed over the past twenty years primarily by two men: Dr. Ray L. Birdwhistell, presently the senior research scientist at the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Philadelphia, and his former associate, Dr. Albert Scheflen, now Director of the Project on Human Communication at the Bronx State Hospital in New York. Birdwhistell especially has developed theoretical as well as empirical approaches to the study of kinesics as it applies to psychiatric interviewing situations.

Although the science of kinesics and the study of leadership have been developing together chronologically, the two have yet to be married. In the remainder of this paper I would like to report on an investigation that I have conducted over the past two years that brings together these two lines of inquiry.

Before doing so, however, I wish to raise a point of justification--justification, that is, for studying a non-linguistic form of communication within a discipline that has traditionally placed its primary emphasis on communicating through use of the language arts.

My justification is a very simple one: Kinesics is a language! And although it does not use phonemes and morphemes to communicate, it does communicate, willy-nilly, like it or not. One of the most significant reasons I can conceive why we in speech need to be concerned about it, if anyone is, is that kinesic communication must accompany the spoken word in

any situation in which the speaker is visible to the listener. Whether this form of visible communication (which is almost universally present) proves helpful or disruptive must surely be the concern of people within our disciplins. Birdwhistell provides a rationale for this kind of study that could have been (actually should have been) written by someone in the field of speech:

> Inspection of any extensive body of interactional data offers proof that humans vocalize but a very small percentage of their interactional time. Furthermore such vocalizations do not characteristically take place in a situation . . . shaded to obscure visual experience or in a situation of such anesthetic force as to prevent proprioceptive and automatic feedback. It is not necessary to deprecate the role of language or even words and sentences in the communicative process. However from the point of view of the behavioral scientist concerned with communication, language is an infracommunicational system. I am convinced that neither language nor communication can be either studied or understood so long as we assume that either subsumes the other.5

Assuming that I have justified this kind of study, I would now like to report on an investigation that I conducted which correlated kinesic research and the study of small group discussion. The main purpose of the project was to investigate the relationships among several forms of kinesic communication, several forms of verbal communication, and the perception of leadership in small group policy discussions.

There were four areas of kinesic communication observed. These were chosen after several pilot studies indicated that

they were observable with a high degree of reliability, were fairly mutually exclusive, and encompassed an overwhelming majority of the bodily movements that a seated discussant could conceivably engage in. They were labeled and defined as follows:

DYNAMISM - A discussant is said to be dynamic if he moves his hands or arms a great deal, especially as he talks. If a discussant makes especially forceful and/or frequent movements of the hands or arms almost every time he speaks, he would be marked very high on the dynamism scale, even if he speaks infrequently.
If a discussant leaves his arms and hands on the desk top or in his lap most of the time, even when he talks, he would be marked very low on the dynamism scale, even though he may talk very often, have alert posture, and active face and head gestures.

ALERTNESS - A discussant is said to be alert if he makes much use of his head and facial muscles; if he raises and lowers his eyebrows, frowns, smiles, nods, or shakes his head often -- if, in other words, he has an active head and face.
If a discussant has a great deal of sameness about his facial expression for long periods of time and moves his head very little, he would be marked low on the alertness scale, even if he talks quite a bit, has alert posture, and makes a great number of arm and hand movements.
An especially good time to watch for alertness is when a discussant begins to speak, since he is often reacting most at that moment to something just said, and this reaction will often show in his head and face.

INVOLVEMENT - A discussant is said to be deeply involved if his posture, especially when he is talking, is alert, upright, even leaning forward slightly in his seat.
He is said to be less involved if he slouches or relapses somewhat in his seat, especially during periods when he is talking.
If he slumps most of the time, including when he is talking, he would be marked quite low on the involvement scale, even if he talks a great deal and makes use of many arm and facial gestures when doing so.

PARTICIPATION - A discussant would be marked high on the participation scale if he is observed to be talking (mouth moving) a large percentage of the time.

Three verbal, or linguistic variables, were simultaneously observed by a separate group of listeners. These were adapted from Carter's summary of research which isolated three linguistic factors which were consistently observable and analyzable "in spite of considerable variation in group size, kind of task, and leadership practice."[6] They were defined as follows:

GROUP GOAL FACILITATION - These are the type of comments that show an effort to help the group achieve goals. A discussant whose comments are often characterized by efficiency, and a desire to have the group arrive at a definite decision would be marked high on the Group Goal Facilitation scale.
If a discussant makes no remarks that show he is interested in the group's arriving at a definite answer to the discussion question, he would be marked low on the Group Goal Facilitation scale.

INDIVIDUAL PROMINENCE - These are the type of comments that a discussant makes that show efforts to stand out from others in the group and individually achieve various personal goals.
A discussant who makes a large number of comments that are characterized by authoritarianism, aggressiveness, confidence and striving for recognition would be marked high on the Individual Prominence scale.
If a member seems to be promoting his solution to the problem rather than seeking a solution that all members can agree or compromise on, or if he tries to tell the rest of the group how to run the discussion, he would be marked high on the Individual Prominence scale.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS - These are the type of comments that show a member's efforts to establish and maintain a friendly behavior pattern toward the other group members.

> A discussant whose comments are often characterized by geniality, cordiality and agreeableness would be marked high on the Interpersonal Relations scale. If a discussant makes few comments designed to render him accepted by the other group members, or makes comments that alienate him from the other group members, he would be marked low on the Interpersonal Relations scale.

Forty-eight college age discussants were observed in groups of four during twelve 30-minute sessions in which they discussed a policy question relating to the structure of universities in the United States. In each session an average of 11 observers rated the discussants on the amount and intensity of their bodily movements from behind a one-way mirror, a position which did not allow their hearing any of the vocal portion of the discussion. The four kinesic factor definitions delineated above were given the observers in a rotation pattern. Their ratings were made on 7-point evaluative scales.

Simultaneously, an average of 10 observers rated the discussants on the three types of verbal comments from a position that allowed the observers to hear, but not see any of the bodily communication.

When each discussion session was concluded, the discussants were asked to rate every other discussant "on the amount of influence each had in the group." The four kinesic and three verbal variables were then compared to the dependent variable, leadership, and to each other by stepwise multiple regression analysis.

Results of the study appeared to warrant the following conclusions:

1) Of the four kinesic and three verbal variables tested, Participation (amount of mouth movement) is related to leadership perception.

2) Dynamism (arm and hand movements) and Individual Prominence (comments designed to further individual goals) significantly relate to leadership perception.

3) Among the four kinesic variables considered, leadership perception appears to be a function of Participation and Dynamism, in that order.

4) Among the three verbal variables considered, leadership perception appears to be a function of Individual Prominence and Group Goal Facilitation (comments designed to further group goals), in that order.

5) The perception of leadership in male discussants is more significantly related to Dynamism and Interpersonal Relations (comments designed to promote a friendly attitude) than it is in female discussants.

6) Dynamism and Interpersonal Relations operate as functions of the topic being discussed in their relations to leadership perception.

The results of the study indicate promise for kinesic communication as a meaningful predictor of leadership perception. If further research validates this suspicion, in what ways

can kinesic research benefit our discipline? The most practical application of this kind of investigation is the potential ability it provides for the training of small group discussion leaders. If continued kinesic leadership research confirms the present findings, we can confidently teach potential leaders in education, industry, government and other areas that if they move in certain ways, and make certain types of comments, they will be perceived in a leadership role. This, of course, is a long way from saying they will be effective leaders. It will take an even greater effort in future studies to satisfactorily answer all the ramifications of that complex question.

The findings of this present study relating to the relationship between kinesic and verbal forms also indicate several possibilities for future research. Once the correlative nature of the kinesic and verbal modes in normal persons has been well confirmed, studies comparing normal persons with those having various types of functional speech disorders could be conducted. Stuttering is one such disorder that might benefit from such investigations. The phenomenon of late speech in young children is another area that might have some light shed on it by investigation of kinesic-verbal interplay.

There are numerous other facets of small group discussion where kinesic research is needed: The relation of kinesic forms of communication to consensus and group cohesiveness;

The effect of the kinesic mode when various kinds of group tasks are employed; The effect of kinesic communication when appointed, rather than emergent leaders are used. For all practical purposes, any leadership variable that has been studied using verbal forms of communication, needs to be considered in light of the kinesic mode.

The present study is a start. It opens an avenue that has heretofore not been opened. Future investigations into the relationships between small group communication patterns and leadership-perception should profit by the information pregnant in kinesic communication.

Footnotes

[1]Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (eds.) Group Dynamics: Research and Theory (3rd ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. viii.

[2]cf. Robert F. Bales, "Task Roles and Social Roles in Problem Solving Groups," in Ivan D. Steiner and Martin Fishbein (eds.) Current Studies in Social Psychology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), pp. 321-33.

[3]cf. Ernest G. Bormann Discussion and Group Methods: Theory and Practice (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 244-60 and 331-4.

[4]Hugh C. Russell, "An Investigation of Leadership Maintenance Behavior" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1970).

[5]Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Body Behavior and Communication," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. III, 28.

[6]Launor F. Carter, "Recording and Evaluating the Performance of Individuals as Members of Small Groups," Personnel Psychology, VII (1954), 479.